

The Real Iran Hostage Crisis: A CIA Covert Op

By Harry V. Martin

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Global Research Editor's Note

The script of Best Film Academy Award Movie “Argo” which depicts the Iran Hostage Crisis is largely based on fiction.

The purpose of the film is to rewrite history, to falsify what actually happened as well as provide a human face to US foreign policy.

Amply documented, the Iran Hostage Crisis was a complex CIA covert operation intent upon stalling the Iranian Revolution as well as spearheading the political demise of President Jimmy Carter.

The following article first published in 1995 is based on extensive documentation collected by Fara Mansoor, a prominent Iranian intellectual.

Michel Chossudovsky, February 26, 2013

The Real Iranian Hostage Story from the Files of Fara Mansoor

By Harry V. Martin

Free America, 1995

Fara Mansoor is a fugitive. No, he hasn't broken any laws in the United States. His crime is the truth. What he has to say and the documents he carries are equivalent to a death warrant for him, Mansoor is an Iranian who was part of the “establishment” in Iran long before the 1979 hostage taking. Mansoor's records actually discount the alleged “October Surprise” theory that the Ronald Reagan-George Bush team paid the Iranians not to release 52 American hostages until after the November 1980 Presidential elections.

Mansoor's meticulous documents, shared exclusively with this magazine, shows a much more sinister plot, the plot to take the hostages in the first place. “For 15 years the truth about the nature and origins of the Iranian hostage crisis has been buried in a mountain of misinformation,” Mansoor states. “Endless expert analysis has served only to deepen the fog that still surrounds this issue. We have been led to believe that the ‘crisis’ was a spontaneous act that just sprang out of the ‘chaos’ of the ‘Islamic Revolution’. Nothing could be further from the truth!”

“To really understand the hostage crisis and ‘who done it’, one has to look not only with a microscope, but also a wide angle lens to have a panoramic view of this well scripted ‘drama’,” Mansoor states. “That ‘drama’ was the result of large historical patterns, models, and motives. Once its true nature is understood, it will be clear how Iran/Contra happened.

Why Rafsanjani has been trying to ‘move toward the West,’ and why Reagan called him a ‘moderate’. And why, during the Gulf War, James Baker said, ‘we think Iran has conducted itself in a very, very credible way through this crisis’” Mansoor emphasizes that the “October Surprise” myth has served as dangerous misinformation.

THOUSANDS OF DOCUMENTS IN SUPPORT

With thousands of documents to support his position, Mansoor says that the “hostage crisis” was a political “management tool” created by the pro-Bush faction of the CIA, and implemented through an a priori Alliance with Khomeini’s Islamic Fundamentalists.” He says the purpose was twofold:

- To keep Iran intact and communist-free by putting Khomeini in full control.
 - To destabilize the Carter Administration and put George Bush in the White House.
- “The private Alliance was the logical result of the intricate Iranian political reality of the mid-70s, and a complex network of powerful U.S.-Iranian ‘business’ relationships,” Mansoor states. “I first met Khomeini in 1963 during the failed coup attempt against the Shah. Since that time I have been intimately involved with Iranian politics. I knew in 1979 that the whole, phoney ‘Islamic Revolution’ was ‘mission implausible’.” Mansoor was frank. “There is simply no way that those guys with the beards and turbans could have pulled off such a brilliantly planned operation without very sophisticated help.”

Mansoor has spent 10 years researching the issue.

“I have collected enough data to yield a very clear picture. Mr. Bush’s lieutenants removed the Shah, brought Khomeini back to Iran, and guided his rise to power, sticking it to President Carter, the American people (52 in particular), and the Iranian people.”

He stated with boxes and boxes of evidence to support his contentions.

“My extensive research has revealed the heretofore untold truth about this episode. This is not another ‘October Surprise’ theory purporting how the hostage crisis resulted in some Khomeini-Republic better deal. That theory puts the cart before the horse. Its absurd premise is that a major international deal was initiated and consummated in three weeks. Give me a break! Bill Casey didn’t have to go to Paris to play lets-make-a-deal. The ‘deal’ had been in operation for at least two years. This game of blind-man’s-bluff around Casey’s gravestone was more disinformation, damage control.”

REAGAN, BUSH AND THATCHER IN IRAN IN 1978

Mansoor produced a confidential document called the “Country Team Minutes” of April 26, 1978, more than a year before the hostage crisis. The meeting was held in Iran. The second paragraph of the routine minutes, states, “The Ambassador commented on our distinguished visitors, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Margaret Thatcher, and commented that Teheran seems to be the site for an opposition parties congress.” Mansoor indicates the entire relationship was probably the most sophisticated criminal act in recent history. “That the people who, until recently, were holding power in Washington and those who currently are still in control in Teheran, got there by totally subverting the democratic process of both countries is news. That their methods of subversion relied on kidnapping, extortion and murder is criminal,” Mansoor states.

Mansoor became a target after he did a radio show in Portland on November 13, 1992. It was the first time he attempted to go public with his documents and information. The Iranian regime has placed a bounty on Mansoor’s head and he has received many death threats.

Is Mansoor just another conspiracy nut? Ervand Abrahamian of Baruch College of New York stated in a letter to Mansoor,

“As you know I am very weary of conspiracy theories. But, despite my preconceived bias, I must admit I found your manuscript to be thoroughly researched, well documented, and, of course extremely relevant to the present. You have done an first-class job of interviewing participants, collecting data from scattered sources, and putting them together like a highly complicated puzzle.”

Mansoor’s meticulous research clearly demonstrates how Khomeini’s published vision of an Islamic Government (Vilayat-Faqih) dovetailed with the regional and global strategic objectives of a hard-core subset of the U.S. National Security establishment loyal to George Bush. It shows that the Iranian hostage crisis was neither a crisis nor chaos. In 1953, the CIA orchestrated a coup in Iran, which threw out the democratic government and installed the Shah.

In order to understand the imperative of this Alliance, we must realistically examine the sociopolitical alignment both in Iran and the U.S., and accurately assess their respective interests to find the command ground for this coalescence. The anti-monarchic forces in mid-70s Iran consisted of various nationalists groups including religious reformist, the Islamic Fundamentalists, and the leftists and communist.

The Nationalist forces were varied. Some were from within the government, but they were poorly organized and without grass-roots support. Their position was clearly anti-left and anti-communist, but they were vulnerable to being taken over by the well-organized left.

The Islamic Fundamentalists had no government experience, but they had major grassroots supports. Islam, in its Shi’ite format was deeply embedded in the lives of the vast majority of the Iranian people. The Fundamentalists were absolutely anti-communist.

CARTER FIRES 800 CIA COVERT OPERATORS

The philosophical divide within the U.S. National Security establishment, especially the CIA, became quite serious in the aftermath of Watergate. To make matters worse, the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, his campaign promise to clean the “cowboy” elements out of the Central Intelligence Agency and his “human rights” policies alarmed the faction of the CIA loyal to George Bush. Bush was CIA director under Richard Nixon. Finally, the firing of CIA Director George Bush by Carter, and the subsequent “Halloween Massacre” in which Carter fired over 800 CIA covert operatives in 1977, angered the “cowboys” beyond all measure. That was Carter’s October surprise, 800 firings on Halloween 1977.

Bush and his CIA coverts were well aware of the Shah’s terminal cancer, unknown to President Carter. The team had an elaborate vested interest to protect. They were determined to keep Iran intact and communist-free and put George Bush in the White House.

TIMELINE: SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Hence, the Islamic Fundamentalists were the only viable choice through which the Bush covert team could implement its own private foreign policy. The results: the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the fall of President Carter, and the emergence of something called the “New World Order.” Mansoor’s documents show step-by-step events:

1. In 1974, the Shah of Iran was diagnosed with cancer.
2. In 1975, former CIA director, and the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Richard Helms learned of the Shah’s cancer through the Shah’s closest confidant, General Hossein Fardoust. The Shah, Helms and Fardoust had been close personal friends since their school days together in Switzerland during the 1930s.
3. On November 4, 1976, concurrent with Jimmy Carter’s election as President, CIA Director George Bush issued a secret memo to the U.S. Ambassador in Iran, Richard Helms, asking:

“Have there been any changes in the personality pattern of the Shah; what are their implication pattern for political behavior? Identification of top military officers that most likely play key roles in any transference of power if the Shah were killed...who will be the leading actors? How will the Shah’s pet projects, including the economic development program, be effected by his departure?”
4. By July 1977, anticipating trouble ahead, the Bush covert team issued preliminary script for the transition of power in Iran. According to John D. Stemple, a CIA analyst and Deputy Chief Political officer of the U.S. Embassy in Iran,

“A ten page analysis of the opposition written by the embassy’s political section in July 1977 correctly identified Bakhiar, Bazargan, Khomeini and Behesti as major actors in the drama that begin unfolding a year later.”

5. Contrary to this analysis, in August 1977, the “official wing” of the CIA fed President Carter a 60-page Study on Iran which concluded:

“The Shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well into the 1980s...and there will be no radical changes in Iranian political behavior in the near future.”

6. On October 31, 1977, president Carter made good on his campaign promise to clean the “cowboys” out of the CIA. He fired over 800 covert operatives from the Agency, many of whom were loyal to George Bush. Carter’s presidency split the CIA. It produced in them, among whom were “many well-trained in political warfare, a concerted will for revenge.” By the end of the 1970s many of these special covert operatives had allied themselves with George Bush’s candidacy, and later with Ronald Reagan’s presidential campaign.

7. On November 15, the Shah of Iran visited Washington, D.C. Carter toasted his guest, “If ever there was a country which has blossomed forth under enlightened leadership, it would be the ancient empire of Persia.”

8. On November 23, Ayatollah Khomeini’s elder son, Haji Mustafa, died mysteriously in Najaf, Iraq. According to professor Hamid Algar, he was “assassinated by the Shah’s U.S.-instituted security police SAVAK...the tragedy inflamed the public in Iran.” Ayatollah Khomeini placed an advertisement in the French Newspaper Le Monde which read: “thanking people for condolences that had been sent of the murder of his son”. He also “appealed to the army to liberate Iran, and to the intellectuals and all good Muslims to continue their criticism of the Shah”.

9. December 31, 1977, Carter visited the Shah in Iran. He toasted the Shah for maintaining Iran as “an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world.” Ironically, that so-called stability evaporated before the champagne lost its fizz.

10. On January 7, 1978, an insidious article entitled Iran and the Red and Black Colonialism, appeared in the Iranian daily newspaper Ettela’at. It castigated the exiled Khomeini, and produced a massive protest riot in the Holy City of Qum the next day. The clergy had little choice but to rally to Khomeini’s defense. The Qum incident shifted many of the clergy from a position of support for the Shah’s monarchy to an active opposition. That “dirty trick” perpetuated by General Fardoust was the trigger that sparked Islamic movement participating in the anti-Shah democratic Revolution. John D. Stempel, characterized Fardoust’s importance to the Alliance: “it is hard to over estimated the value of having a mole in the inner circle of the Shah.”

11. On February 3, a confidential communiqué from the U.S. Embassy clearly reflected the vision of the Alliance:

“Though based on incomplete evidence, our best assessment to date is that the Shia Islamic movement dominated by Ayatollah Khomeini is far better organized, enlighten and able to resist Communism than its detractors would lead us to believe. It is rooted in the Iranian people more than any western ideology, including Communism.”

12. April 1978, Le Monde “identified Khomeini’s Liberation Movement of Iran as the most significant force in the opposition followed by the Shi’ite Islam joins the reformist of progressive critics of the Shah on the same ground. In fact, this analysis was contrary to what Mohaammad Tavassoli, leader of the Liberation Movement of Iran, expressed to John D. Stempel on August 21, 1978:

“The nationalist movement in Iran lacks a popular base. The choice is between Islam and Communism...close ties between the Liberation Movement of Iran and the religious movement was necessary. Iran was becoming split by Marxist and the religious.”

13. On April 26, the confidential minutes of the U. S. Embassy Country team meeting welcomed Bush, Reagan and Thatcher.

14. On May 6, Le Monde became the first western newspaper to interview Khomeini in Najaf, Iraq. Khomeini acknowledged his compatibility with the strategic imperatives of the Bush covert team, “we would not collaborate with the Marxists, even to the overthrow of the Shah.”

15. The same month, Khomeini’s old ally from the failed 1963 coup (that resulted in Khomeini’s arrest and major uprising in June 1963 and his subsequent exile to Iraq) General Valliollah Qarani sent his emissary to meet Khomeini in Najaf. Qarani had been a major CIA asset in Iran since the 1953 coup. Seeing another chance to gain power for himself, he advised Khomeini, according to former Iranian President Abol Hassan Bani-sader:

“if you settle for the Shah’s departure and don’t use anti-American rhetoric, Americans are ready to take him out.”

16. In August, the Bush team sent its own point man to meet the exiled Ayatollah in Najaf. Professor Richard Cottam carried excellent credentials. During the 1953 coup, he had been in charge of the CIA’s Iran Desk, also, he had been in close contact with Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi in the U.S. since 1975. Curiously, he admitted to Bani-sadr in 1987, that he had not been working for the Carter Administration. Cottam’s visit must have had an impact, because Iran suddenly began to experience a series of mysterious catastrophes:

- In Aberdeen, Fundamentalist supporters burned down a theater killing the innocent occupants, blaming it on the SAVAK and the Shah.
- There were riots in Isfahan that resulted in martial law.
- On August 27, one of Khomeini’s rivals among the Shia Islamic faithful outside of Iran, Ayatollah Mosa Sadr mysteriously disappeared. According to an intelligence source he was killed and buried in Libya.

17. By late August, the Shah was totally confused. U.S. Ambassador Sullivan recorded the Shah’s pleadings over the outbreak of violence:

“he said the pattern was widespread and that it was like an outbreak of a sudden rash in the country...it gave evidence of sophisticated planning and was not the work of spontaneous oppositionists...the Shah presented that it was the work of foreign intrigue...this intrigue went beyond the capabilities of the Soviet KGB and must, therefore, also involve British and American CIA. The Shah went on to ask ‘Why was

the CIA suddenly turning against him? What had he done to deserve this sort of action from the United States?"

18. September 8, the Shah's army gunned down hundreds of demonstrators in Teheran in what became known as the "Jaleh Square Massacre".

19. On September 9, President Carter phoned the Shah to confirm his support for the Shah, a fact that enraged the Iranian population.

20. A few days later, Carter's National Security aide, Gary Sick, received a call from Richard Cottam, requesting a discrete meeting between him and Khomeini's representative in the U.S., Dr. Yazdi. Sick refused.

21. Khomeini for the first time, publicly called for the Shah's overthrow.

22. In Mid-September, at the height of the revolution, "one of the handful of Khomeini's trusted associates", Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Beheshti, secretly visited the United States among others, he also meet with Yazdi in Texas. Beheshti was an advocate of the eye-for-an-eye school of justice.

23. In early October 1978, the agent for the Bush covert team arranged to force Khomeini out of Iraq.

24. October 3, 1978, Yazdi picked up Khomeini in Iraq and headed for Kuwait. According to Gary Sick, he received an urgent call from Richard Cottam, learning for the first time that Khomeini had been forced out of Iraq. Sick was told that Khomeini and his entourage were stuck in no man's land while attempting to cross the border. Cottam was requesting White House intervention to resolve the issue. Sick respond, "there is nothing we could do".

25. October 6, Khomeini's entourage, having gotten back through Baghdad, popped up in Paris. According to Bani-sadr, "it was Khomeini who insisted on going to Paris instead of Syria or Algeria". Whoever helped Khomeini out of the Kuwaiti border impasse had to have been on good terms with both the French and Saddam Hussein.

26. December 12, Yazdi made a trip to the U.S. to promote Khomeini and his Islamic Republic. Yazdi met secretly with Henry Precht on an unofficial capacity. Precht was the Director of the Iran Desk at the State Department and one of the Bush team's main choke points in the Carter Administration. Later Precht and Yazdi appeared together for televised discussion of Iran. Yazdi assured the American public that Khomeini had not really called for a "torrent of blood", and that the "election would be absolutely free". The Islamic Republic "would enjoy full freedom of speech and the press, including the right to attack Islam.

27. December 28, Cottam visited Khomeini in Paris where he noted that U.S. citizen Dr. Yazdi was the "leading tactician in Khomeini's camp" and apparent "chief of staff". Khomeini was not interested in the Mullahs taking over the government. Also noted that "Khomeini's movement definitely plans to organize a political party to draw on Khomeini's charisma. Cottam thinks such a party would win all Majlis seats."

28. Leaving Paris, Cottam slipped into Teheran, arriving the first week in January 1979, to prepare Khomeini's triumphal return to Iran.

29. January 4, 1979, Carter's secret envoy, General Robert Huyser arrived in Iran. His mission was to prevent the "fall of the Shah". According to Huyser, Alexander Haig, ostensibly a strong Shah supporter-inexplicably, "took violent exception to the whole idea." Huyser recalled that "General Haig never gave me a full explanation of his strong objections." Huyser also revealed that Ambassador Sullivan "had also expressed objections." Two pro-Shah advocates opposed to the prevention of the Shah's fall.

30. On January 14, President Carter finally "authorized a meeting between Warren Zimmerman and Ibrahim Yazdi. On the same day, Khomeini, in an interview on CBS claimed, "a great part of the army was loyal to him" and that "he will be in effect the strong man of Iran."

31. On January 16, in an exact repeat of the 1953 CIA coup, Bush's covert team ushered the "eccentric and weak" Shah out of Iran.

32. On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini staged his own version of a "triumphal return" in the streets of Teheran.

33. Khomeini moved quickly to establish his authority. On February 5 he named Mehdi Bazargan, a devoted Muslim and anti-communist, interim Prime Minister. Yazdi and Abbas Amir Entezam became Bazargan's deputies, Dr. Sanjabi Foreign Minister, and General Qarani was named military Chief of Staff.

34. On February 11, 1979, in seemingly a bizarre twist, General Qarani asked the Shah's "eyes and ears" General Hossien Fardoust for recommendations to fill the new top posts in Iran's armed forces. Outside of the Chief of SAVAK, all the other recommendations were accepted. Shortly after, General Fardoust became head of SAVAMA, Khomeini's successor to SAVAK.

35. On February 14, 1979, two weeks after Khomeini's return to Iran, the U.S. Embassy in Teheran was seized by Khomeini supporters disguised as leftist guerrillas in an attempt to neutralize the left. U.S. hostages were seized, but to the chagrin of Khomeini's Fundamentalists, the Iranian coalition government restored order immediately. Ironically, in the same day in Kabul, Afghanistan, the U.S. Ambassador was also kidnapped by fanatic Islamic Fundamentalists disguised as leftist guerrillas and killed in the gunfight.

36. On February 14, soon after the order was restored at the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, Khomeini's aide Yazdi supplied the Embassy with a group of Iranians for compound security. Ambassador Sullivan installed armed, and trained this SWAT squad lead by SAVAK/CIA agent Mashallah Kahsani, with whom Sullivan developed a close working relationship.

37. By August, pro-Bush CIA official George Cave was visiting Iran to provide intelligence briefings to Khomeini's aides, especially Yazdi and Entezam. These intelligence exchanges continued until October 31, the day Carter fired Bush and the 800

agents. Then with all the Iranian officials who had restored order in the first Embassy seizure eliminated, the stage was set for what happened four days later.

38. On November 4, 1979, the U.S. Embassy was taken again. Leading the charge was none other than Ambassador Sullivan's trusted Mashallah Kashani, the Embassy's once and former security chief.

With the evidence and documentation supplied by Mansoor, the alleged October Surprise would not have been necessary. President Carter was the target, in revenge for the Halloween Massacre, the night 800 CIA operatives and George Bush were fired by Carter. The main thrust, however, was to prevent a communist takeover of Iran on the Shah's anticipated death.

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